

Lake Ontario Committee

Holiday Inn Grand Island, New York
Grand Island, NY
30, 31 March 2004

Executive Summary

Participants: Chair Steve Lapan (NYDEC) and Rob MacGregor (OMNR)

Highlights: Lake Ontario has fewer mature lake trout than 20 years ago. A carbon:oxygen isotope ratio can identify whether a lake trout spent its early life in lake or hatchery. There is evidence of natural reproduction all along the south shore, particularly in the west and east ends. Pike are less abundant, perhaps due to management of water levels. Eels are becoming increasingly rare. This year, pumpkinseeds were unusually abundant in Lake St. Lawrence. *Diporeia* numbers are not dropping off as quickly at depths beyond 325 feet as in Lake Michigan. Mysids have not continued to decline and are in better condition on the north side of the lake. Biomass and condition of alewife hit new lows in July 2003, but condition has since surged. Slimy sculpins are more abundant than in recent years, but small in size. Smelt populations have collapsed. Growth of chinook salmon fell to record-low levels in 2003.

1. Sea Lamprey Screened for Disease (attachment)

Gavin Christie (GLFC) reviewed plans for screening sea lamprey for disease prior to moving them between the lakes.

2. Sea Lamprey Targets

Gavin Christie (GLFC) will provide the LOC with a revised target estimate for its consideration.

3. Allegheny NFH (attachment)

The LOC wrote the USFWS, concerned that coded wire tags (CWTs) have not been used on lake trout since 1996. It is also concerned with reports that there are insufficient funds to produce lake trout next year (see attachment). The LEC and LOC have each asked that the CLC take up this issue at its April 20, 2004 meeting.

4. Fish Community Objectives for the St. Lawrence River

In June 2003, the LOC submitted fish community objectives for the St. Lawrence River for GLFC publication; at that time, the GLFC indicated that the manuscript was in line for editing in the spring of 2004.

5. State of Lake Ontario Report

The LOC will soon send to the GLFC editor the first draft of its state of the lake report.

6. Fish Community Objectives

LOC members plan to consult with publics and to revise fish community objectives for Lake Ontario.

7. American Eels

American eel conservation now has the attention of many agencies. The Atlantic Marine Fisheries Commission has asked for listing of the Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River/Lake Champlain/Richelieu River eel stock under the Endangered Species Act. The NY Power Authority has issued a RFP for an eel ladder on the U.S. side of the Moses Saunders Dam. Methods to divert eels from turbines are being studied, e.g., light arrays and traps. The Canadian Action Plan is proceeding slowly; the East Coast is not seeing eels decline as in the Great Lakes.

8. Reintroduction of Deepwater Coregonids

The LOC formed a Task Force to reintroduce deepwater coregonids. Mark Ebener (CORA, GLFC) reported that CORA commercial fishermen can provide access to spawning ciscoes in the last two weeks of December in Whitefish Bay and western Lake Superior (Cornucopia). USGS has offered use of a large vessel for collecting eggs, if schedule permits. OMNR biologists will spend a week in December 2004 collecting eggs.

The eggs will be isolated at OMNR's Chatsworth facility before being transported to White Lake Provincial Hatchery. NYDEC will investigate availability of a state hatchery for rearing ciscoes. Eggs could be stocked directly in Lake Ontario using AstroTurf sandwiches; however, direct stocking would require a hundred times more eggs than hatchery-rearing.

The coregonid task group will consult Tom Todd (USGS) and Julie Turgeon (Laval U.). The GLFC may be able to provide seed money to help with travel, etc. The LOC may also request funds from the Restoration Act (December 2004) and the Canada-Ontario Agreement.

9. Environmental Objectives

The LOC will request GLFC funds to support development of environmental objectives for Lake Ontario.

Lake Ontario Committee, March 30-31, 2004

Transfer of Sea Lampreys among Lakes and Disease Screening

Issue: This information item provides the Lake Ontario Committee with an update on the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) its plans to move sea lampreys from Lake Ontario to the upper lakes. These plans have been reviewed and sanctioned by the upper lakes committees.

Background: The commission and the sea lamprey control agents are committed to leading in application of the fish health model program in order to minimize risk to fishes in the Great Lakes. We have met all previous requirements for testing of fish proposed for importation from outside the Great Lakes basin. During last year, we met all testing requirements for Heterosporis following the Fish Health Committee's (FHC's) recommendation to the CLC to limit transfer of fish from Lake Ontario. We will continue to work with the FHC to ensure that adequate evaluations and screening procedures are in place for any transfer where there could be risk to fish in the wild. We will continue to work with the Lake Committees evaluate the trade-off between the risks of transfers versus their benefits to sea lamprey control.

Why move sea lampreys? Purposes for moving sea lampreys from Lake Ontario to the upper lakes include:

- adult males for sterilization and release for control in the St. Marys River;
- large larvae and transformers for mark-and-recapture estimates of the size of the population of newly metamorphosed sea lampreys in Lake Huron;
- larvae for mark-and-recapture estimates of larval populations to verify the accuracy of our assessment techniques; and
- larvae for extraction of migratory pheromone for field trial research at Hammond Bay.

Larval sea lampreys in the Lake Ontario drainage are especially fast growing and productive offering opportunity to efficiently collect larger and metamorphosing specimens. Adults from Lake Ontario represent a source independent of the effects of the control effort on the St. Marys River and as such provide a valuable influx of males to this alternative control effort.

The disease issue: The FHC has recommended that fish movement from Lake Ontario be minimized in order to prevent the spread of the microsporidian parasite Heterosporis from Lake Ontario. Further, the FHC has recommended that the model program screening for restricted diseases be carried out on sea lampreys moved among the lakes. Sea lampreys have been found to harbour a number of diseases that are common in to other Great Lakes fishes including, for example, bacterial kidney disease and enteric redmouth. The model program seeks to restrict movement of diseases that have a limited geographic range in the lakes. Along with Heterosporis, members of the FHC are concerned about movement of the following geographically isolated or non-evident diseases: whirling disease, anti-biotic resistant furunculosis, and EED.

Our proposal for screening: We propose to screen all sea lampreys moved from Lake Ontario for Heterosporis along with the emergency and restricted diseases from the model program. **We do not intend to screen sea lampreys transferred among the upper three lakes.** We consider the upper three lakes to be open systems and have clear evidence of sea lampreys moving among these lakes (mark and recapture results). We will continue to move animals among the upper lakes as we have for the last decade for SMRT release and for mark and recapture without screening. We do not intend to transfer sea lampreys from Lake Erie this year.

We intend to solicit help with this screening from members of the FHC. Rapid turn around is critical to efficiently and effectively carrying out these transfers. We will ask the FHC to provide further review of the details of our screening plans.

Screening results and recommendations to the lake committee: We will work with the chair to establish a subcommittee of the FHC to review the results of the screening and make recommendation to the lake committee based on these results.

Positive observations of Heterosporis will result in no transfer from the source location. Observations of other diseases or pathogens will have to be reviewed by the FHC and, based on determination of their geographic distribution and potential effect, recommendation on the transfer will be made to the lake committee.

Future direction: We intend to continue the transfer of sea lampreys to improve assessment and control to support the Fish Community Objectives in all the Great Lakes. We are supportive of transmission studies on Heterosporis in order to better understand risk of transfer with sea lampreys. We also support a formal risk analysis of the costs and benefits of movement of sea lampreys from Lake Ontario to the upper lakes.



Great Lakes Fishery Commission

ESTABLISHED BY CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES TO IMPROVE AND PERPETUATE FISHERY RESOURCES

Attachment to item 3

LAKE ONTARIO COMMITTEE

March 1, 2004

Dr. Kofi Fynn-Aikens
Chief, Lower Great Lakes Fisheries Resources Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
405 North French Road, Suite 120A
Amherst, New York 14228

Dear Kofi,

The Lake Ontario Committee considers lake trout restoration in Lake Ontario to be one of its highest priorities, and our longstanding partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has been instrumental in advancing this program. Through our collaborative efforts we have achieved a number of significant milestones in restoring a self-sustaining lake trout population in Lake Ontario, however, it has come to our attention that staff vacancies and budget cuts at the Allegheny National Fish Hatchery (ANFH) will result in reduced yearling lake trout production. We find this news to be in complete contradiction to Director Steve Williams' statement that he was going to "put the fish back in the (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife Service" in January, 2003.

The partner agencies of the Lake Ontario Committee have for many years invested a great deal of our limited staff and funding resources to the lake trout restoration program, and we are greatly concerned that reducing the yearling lake trout annual allotment below the 500,000 currently allocated for Lake Ontario will seriously jeopardize the future of this program. From the Lake Ontario Committee's perspective, maintenance of the lake trout propagation program at ANFH represents the most significant aspect of our partnership with the Service.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and we look forward to hearing from you regarding how you and Region 5 propose to address the deficiencies at ANFH. Please feel free to contact me should you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Steven R. LaPan
Chair, Lake Ontario Committee

cc: Mr. Marvin Moriarty, Director, Region 5 USFWS
Rob MacGregor, Vice Chair, Lake Ontario Committee
Douglas Stang, Chief, NYSDEC Bureau of Fisheries

-----Original Message-----

From: Kofi_FynnAikins@fws.gov
[mailto:Kofi_FynnAikins@fws.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, March 09, 2004 3:18 PM
To: Steven Lapan
Subject: Re: Letter re: ANFH

Hi Steve,

It was great talking with you yesterday. Thank you for your concerns about the budget crisis at the Allegheny National Fish Hatchery (ANFH). I couldn't agree with you more about the importance of our lake trout restoration efforts in the lower Great Lakes. Over the years, I have come to appreciate the contributions of our partners, especially NYSDEC, in this restoration effort. In fiscal year (FY) 2002, ANFH's operational budget was \$160,000, and in FY 2003 it was \$139,000; this year it's \$96,000. ANFH cannot continue to maintain its current lake trout production at this budget level. Basically, if we don't receive any extra (or promise of more) funds in a couple of months, we will have no choice but to shut down our lake trout production at ANFH.

Our Region 5 Fisheries Program is facing more than a million-dollar budget shortfall this year, and our senior managers are frantically trying to figure out how to deal with it, including closing some field stations. They ranked field stations according to a priority system, the details of which I haven't yet seen. ANFH did not receive a high ranking and therefore, is one of the field stations that received the worst cuts.

As I mentioned to you in our phone conversation, this week our Region 5 Fisheries Program is here in Washington DC doing congressional outreach, and I hope to share this problem with six of the NY Great Lakes delegation I'll be talking to. In addition, we are bringing this matter to the attention of our Regional Director and senior managers in Washington DC. I'm hoping that our partners will also try to help in any way possible, to ensure that we have the resources we need to continue with our lake trout restoration efforts.

If you have any further questions about the budget crisis at ANFH, please don't hesitate to call or email me. Thank you for your understanding and support.

Best regards,

Kofi Fynn-Aikins
Chief, Lower Great Lakes FRO